



CFSA Fact Sheet



Guardianship or Adoption?

Information for relatives caring for youngsters involved with the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)

Growing up in a safe, stable, nurturing environment gives children and teens the best chance for healthy emotional development and mastery of important life skills. Young people need the security only a permanent home and family can provide. The District of Columbia offers relatives (and others, such as godparents) two legal options to increase permanence for children living with them and also involved with CFSA: **guardianship** or **adoption**.



Under **guardianship**, birth parents retain all their rights and many of their responsibilities to the child. However, the guardian has legal custody of the child. Guardianship is intended to be permanent and self-sustaining. It improves stability for children who cannot return to their birth homes but does not legally end the parent-child relationship.

Adoption transfers all rights to and responsibilities for a child from the birth parents to the adoptive parent(s). It legally ends the parent-child relationship and creates a new, permanent family for the child.

Some additional comparisons appear below.

	<i>Guardianship</i>	<i>Adoption</i>
Rights	The guardian gains legal custody of the child while the birth parents retain all other legal rights, including the right to visit the child and to make decisions about his/her care.	Birth parents lose all legal rights, including the right to visit and to make decisions about the child. Adoptive parents gain all legal rights to the child.
Responsibilities	Birth parents retain many responsibilities for the child, such as covering medical costs.	Adoptive parents are fully responsible for the child.
Inheritance	Children retain the right to inherit property, possessions, and other material goods from their birth parents. They cannot inherit from the guardian unless they are named in a will.	Adoptive children have the same right to inherit from their adoptive parents as birth children.
Financial Aid	Guardians may be eligible for financial subsidies to help them care for some children.	Adoptive parents may be eligible for financial subsidies to help them care for some adopted children.

For more information about guardianship and adoption, call CFSA at (202) 671-LOVE.